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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Questions to Ask a Home Health Care Agency

If you are planning to use a home health care agency to hire a registered nurse, home health aid, or companion, consider the following questions:

- Is the agency certified for participation in Medicare and Medicaid programs (where applicable)?
- How long has the agency been serving the community?
- Does the agency provide an initial assessment to determine if the patient would be appropriate for home care and what those services might be?
- Does the agency provide all of the services you need? Can it provide flexibility to meet the patient's changing health care needs?
- How does the agency choose and train its employees? Are background checks made? Does it protect its employees with written personnel policies, benefits packages, and malpractice insurance?
- Does the agency provide literature explaining its services, eligibility requirements, fees, and funding?
- Does the agency have arrangements in place for emergencies? Are the agency's caregivers available 24 hours a day, seven days a week? How quickly can they start service?
- Are references from former clients and doctors available?
- What types of programs does the company have in place to assure quality care is provided?

Source: National Family Caregivers Association

What Makes a Marriage or Long-term Relationship Work?

Periods of conflict, frustration or anger are an inevitable part of every marriage or long-term relationship simply because they are in the fabric of all human relationships. Why are some couples able to work through their disagreements or frustrations and survive and thrive, while others end up in a vicious cycle of negative feelings, emotional distancing and deterioration that leads to divorce?

Staying together

Contrary to popular belief, it's not how much you love each other that will best determine the future of your relationship, but how you handle conflicts and disagreements. Couples that stay together disagree about just as many things and the same things - money, time, housework, sex, priorities, the kids, etc. - as couples that divorce. The difference is that those in successful marriages know how to manage conflict in a constructive and positive way.

Researchers from two major research labs in the United States have found that the likelihood of divorce can be predicted by studying how couples handle conflict. Disagreement isn't predictive of divorce. Fighting isn't predictive of divorce. Criticizing, stubbornness, withdrawal and arguing that includes put-downs, accusations and rejections is predictive of divorce.

Over time, these negative patterns of dealing with conflict steadily erode all the good things in the relationship, ultimately leading to a relationship overwhelmed by negative feelings.

How to resolve conflicts constructively
By learning to resolve conflicts and manage disagreements constructively, you can limit negative encounters with your partner and strengthen the positive side of your relationship. Follow these guidelines:

1. Eliminate negative communication styles

Are you or your partner guilty of any of the communication styles below?

- criticizing your partner's opinions, feelings or desires
- making accusations
- putting down the thoughts, feelings, actions or worth of your partner
- avoiding disagreements or important discussions
- name calling
- disregarding
- insensitivity
- withdrawing from conflicts
- stonewalling
- bringing up past hurts

These negative ways of interacting sabotage any attempts at constructive communication, erode positive feelings and are devastating to a relationship.

2. Learn how to listen

Constructive and positive communication begins with genuinely attempting to understand the other person's point of view, needs or feelings. First, listening to understand focuses attention on the issue at hand, not on individual personalities. Second, caring to listen to what your partner thinks and feels is a way of showing that you care about him/her. For more effective listening you should do the following:

- Listen for understanding - Give your partner an opportunity to communicate his/her thoughts,

feelings, needs or desires regarding the issue at hand. Listen for understanding, rather than spending time preparing for what you're going to say next.

- *Ask questions - Guard against assuming that you know what your partner meant or felt by asking questions to assure your understanding. Ask questions such as, "Do I hear you correctly?" or "Is this what you are saying?" Avoid questions that result in a simple "yes" or "no" answer.*
- *Summarize - When your partner is finished speaking, repeat what he/she said - in your own words - to confirm with your partner that you understand.*

3. Learn to speak without attacking

By learning to speak without attacking your partner's thoughts, feelings, actions or worth, you can keep disagreements from escalating into full-blown and nasty arguments. To improve your talking skills you should:

- *Make "I" statements - Avoid starting a sentence with "you." It sounds like an accusation or an invitation to fight (which it usually is). Instead, put yourself on the line by sharing how it is for you. Say, "I think..." or "I want..." or "I feel..." No cheating by saying, "I think that you..."*
- *Use "Feeling" words - It's not fair to expect your partner to guess or "figure out" what you are feeling, as in, "If he loved me, he'd know!"*
- *Quit playing the guessing game and say it straight. Be sure to use feeling words like "sad," "happy," "excited," "angry," "worried," etc. Remember to start the sentence with an "I" as in, "I was upset when you forgot about our date."*
- *Focus on issues, not personalities - Deal with specific issues on which decisions and compromise action can be worked out. Be specific when you introduce a complaint. Confine yourself to one issue at a time.*

By talking with "I" statements and focusing on specific issues, you eliminate the possibility altogether of using unproductive and destructive communication styles like accusations, put-downs, or criticizing.

By avoiding negative communication styles and improving your listening and talking skills, you can learn to resolve differences without negative consequences and, in fact, grow stronger and closer by solving them together.

Getting professional help

Sometimes our problems are too hard to solve on our own. If you are concerned about a particularly difficult marital or relationship issue, or if physical abuse, substance abuse or depression are involved, contact Human Management Services (HMS) for counseling, referrals or information. All HMS services are FREE and strictly CONFIDENTIAL. If you need help, why not call an HMS counselor today? We're here to help.

Better Time Management

Why Do We Over-commit?

Are there too many things on your calendar each day to get done? If your answer is "yes," you may be guilty of a common assumption made by many people, say researchers.

According to a study reported by the American Psychological Association, research reveals that people over-commit because we expect to have more time in the future than we have in the present. Of course, when tomorrow turns into today, we discover that we are too busy to do everything we promised. Keep this fact in mind. It will help you to better plan your days and avoid unnecessary frustration.

Three ways to improve your productivity at work

How can you improve your productivity and get more things done each day? Here are three strategies that can help:

1. Schedule your time for work - Be consistent. Don't do personal things when you are scheduled to work. Make a "To Do" list and prioritize your tasks. A list is most effective for those of us who need to consult a reference or see it in writing. When you have completed a task, cross it off your list. You'll get a real sense of completion and satisfaction as you see your list getting shorter and shorter.

2. Do the most-difficult, time-consuming, least-favorite job first - It may sound crazy but you'll be doing it when you have the most energy and motivation. If you tackle the toughest job first, the rest of your tasks will seem that much easier.

3. Don't allow yourself to get interrupted by other people's "emergencies" - How many times have you had your tasks and activities planned, so you could finally get caught up with your own work, and all day long other people keep coming to you with their last minute problems that only you can fix? You don't want to say no, you want to be a team player, but you have stuff to get done too, right? Remember, that being a team player also means respecting others' time and realizing that others have responsibilities too. If your co-workers can't grasp this, you have to. Learn to say no in a polite but firm manner: "I would really like to assist you with that, and I know you have a deadline. Unfortunately, I have a project which I must complete for my boss today. If you can come back tomorrow or another time, or better yet, schedule some time with me so that it is on my calendar, I would be more than happy to help you."

HMS is here to help

Remember, Human Management Services (HMS) is always available to help you or your dependents with personal, family or work-related concerns. All HMS services are FREE and strictly CONFIDENTIAL. Why not call an HMS counselor today? We're here to help.

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